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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000005

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STATE FOR AF/E, AF/RSA AND A/S CARSON

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TAGS: PGOV SO MARR MOPS PTER

SUBJECT: Somalia - ASWJ Loses, Then Regains Key Galgaduud Town in January 2 Fighting with al-Shabaab

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Patterson, Counselor for Somalia Affairs, State Department, Somalia Unit; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 2, al-Shabaab militias wrested control of Dhusamarebb (Galgaduud Region) from Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ). Al-Shabaab's control of Dhusamarebb, the site of ASWJ's headquarters in Galgaduud, however, was shortlived, as ASWJ re-took the town the same day. Al-Shabaab's decision to attempt a frontal attack on an ASWJ stronghold occurred at a time when a significant number of ASWJ fighters had been deployed to protect an ASWJ conference in Abuuwaq. The re-deployment may have persuaded al-Shabaab commanders that Dhusamarebb was vulnerable. It is also possible that ASWJ efforts to strengthen its defenses in the frontline towns of Guriel, Matabaan, and Wabho in anticipation of a rumored al-Shabaab offensive there, may have persuaded al-Shabaab that an attack on Dhusamarebb could succeed. As a result of the attack, the ASWJ Abuuwaq (Galgaduud Region) conference has been interrupted for two weeks. End summary.

¶2. (C) On January 2, al-Shabaab militias briefly wrested control of Dhusamarebb (Galgaduud Region) from local ASWJ forces in an early-morning surprise attack. The al-Shabaab offensive occurred almost exactly twelve months after ASWJ succeeded in taking control of Dhusamarebb and making it their regional headquarters.

¶3. (C) According to ASWJ contacts in Nairobi and sources in Galgaduud, ASWJ fighters retreated to the outskirts of Dhusamarebb after offering only brief resistance to the attacking al-Shabaab militia on January 2. While an al-Shabaab attack on an ASWJ-controlled area was not entirely unexpected, the attempt on Dhusamarebb clearly caught ASWJ by surprise. There had been many rumors of a planned al-Shabaab new-year offensive on the frontline towns of Wabho, Guriel, and Matabaan (all Galgaduud Region), and ASWJ had boasted to the media that its forces there were on high alert.

¶4. (C) Al-Shabaab allegedly committed atrocities against civilians during its brief, January 2 occupation of Dhusamarebb. Multiple contacts allege that al-Shabaab troops killed two employees of a local telecommunications company and beheaded three other civilians. (Note: Somalia Unit was unable to verify an ASWJ claim of the killing of a medical doctor at Dhusamarebb hospital and of the murder of a clan elder.) Sources reported as well that al-Shabaab fighters stripped Dhusamarebb of vehicles, fuel, cash, medicine, foodstuffs, clothes, and other merchandise, which they

shipped to their bases in El-Buur (Galgaduud Region).

¶15. (C) After retreating from Dhusamarebb, ASWJ fighters re-grouped, reinforced, and launched a counter-offensive at about 3:00 p.m. (local) on the same day. Three hours of reportedly fierce clashes dislodged al-Shabaab. Reports of the number of casualties vary.

¶16. (C) Comment: Both ASWJ contacts and other Somalia observers were surprised that al-Shabaab had attempted to take control of an ASWJ stronghold. The attack occurred at a time when a relatively large number of ASWJ troops had been detailed to provide security to high-ranking ASWJ and diaspora figures at an ASWJ conference underway in Abuudwaq (Galgaduud Region). Their re-deployment may have convinced al-Shabaab that Dhusamarebb was vulnerable. Also part of al-Shabaab's calculus may have been ASWJ's well-advertised efforts to reinforce Wabho, Guriel, and Mataban, presumably at the expense of Dhusamarebb. Finally, an attack on ASWJ's Galgaduud headquarters may have been an attempt to disrupt or delay ASWJ's plans, as part of the Abuudwaq conference, to establish formal local administrations in Galgaduud Region. Although the day's fighting ended with ASWJ again in firm control of Dhusamarebb, al-Shabaab's efforts did force an interruption -for two weeks-of the important ASWJ conference that began on December 18 in Abuudwaq. ASWJ in the wake of the January 2 fighting has

NAIROBI 00000005 002 OF 002

called on its adherents to push al-Shabaab out of El-Buur, the only Galgaduud Region district in al-Shabaab's control. An attempt on El-Buur seems unlikely to materialize anytime soon, however.

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